

CPSCA 6 (RSC) Cleared  
2/26/97  
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**LOG OF MEETING**  
**DIRECTORATE FOR ENGINEERING SCIENCES**

**SUBJECT:** Meeting of Soft Contained Play Systems

**DATE OF MEETING:** December 5, 1995

**PLACE:** CPSC Headquarters, Bethesda, MD.

**LOG ENTRY SOURCE:** Mark Kumagai, ESME

**DATE OF ENTRY:** February 24, 1997

**COMMISSION ATTENDEES:**

Susan Cassidy	EHHA
Mary Donaldson	ECSS
James Hoebel	ES
Jean Kennedy	CCA
Mark Kumagai	ESME
Ronald Medford	EXHR
Suad Nakamura	EHHE
Eleanor Perry	ESME
John Preston	ES
Patsy Semple	Com. Gall's Office
Andrew Stadnik	ES
Celestine Trainor	ESHF
Debbie Tinsworth	EHHA
Pamela Weller	Com. Moore's Office

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**NON-COMMISSION ATTENDEES:**

Frederick Boedeker, Tenderfun
Mike Butkus, McDonald's
Maureen Cislo, Product Safety Letter
David Hamilton, Pentes Play
Mike Hayward, Paris Playground
Walt Henderson, ASTM/Carlisle Company
Marylou Iverson, Iverson Associates
Glenn Jewell, Playsafe
Larry Krause, Discovery Zone
Chet Kagel, Playpal
Bruce Navarro, Legislative and Regulatory Affairs
Kevin Poynter, McDonald's Corp.
H.J. Roux, Roux Int'l Inc
Lance Saylor, Discovery Zone
Grant Strawcutter, Soft Play Inc.
Phillip Tate, Omni
Donna Thompson, University of Northern Iowa
John M. Whaler, Product Safety and Liability
Frances Wallach, Total Recreation Mgmt Services

**SUMMARY OF MEETING**

On December 5, 1995, the Commission staff met with the major manufacturers and operators of Soft Contained Play Equipment (SCPE) to discuss the safety aspects of SCPEs present the findings of a review of the data and observations of sites around the country. Enclosed is a copy of the presentation slides. I emphasized that the staff believed that this type of equipment was a safe alternative to traditional playgrounds. Most injuries in traditional outdoor playgrounds are due to falls from the equipment and SCPE has

characteristics such as containment and padding that can prevent falls and minimize fall injuries.

The CPSC staff investigated 16 incidents associated with SCPE and treated in hospital emergency rooms from January 1, 1995, through May 9, 1995. The majority of the victims were males, age 5 and under. Minor injuries such as sprains, strains, contusions and abrasions were reported most frequently, followed by fractures and dislocations. The staff was aware of one death in SCPE at a restaurant establishment. According to the investigation report, a 13 year-old male was lying underneath the balls and asked other teenagers to slide down on top of him. He was found unconscious under the balls and taken to the hospital where he was declared dead a short time later.

The staff visited 13 centers around the country concluded that the equipment was designed to minimize the fall hazard. Staff concluded that supervision and maintenance is necessary to ensure safety. Some concerns were mixing smaller younger children with the older larger children, and equipment located in ball pools.

I reported that the staff observed that children liked to bury themselves under the balls in a ball pool. Staff was concerned that if a child is playing in the balls at the base of the mountain climb or slide, he/she could be injured by another child jumping or sliding on top of the children below.

One major soft play operator indicated that they were taking steps to remove the straps from the mountain climb and to reconfigure the slide exits so that they are separated from the ball pools.

There was discussion to develop a video news release (VNR) to inform consumers of the safety benefits of this type of equipment. Several participants expressed interest in working with the CPSC to develop a VNR.

Enclosure

cc: Colin Church, EXHR  
OS (2)  
ES  
File

**EXHR PUBLICATION, AUDIO-VISUAL, FILM, SPEECH AND REPORT CLEARANCE**

1. PROJECT TITLE	Soft Contained Play Equipment Briefing	2. DUE DATE	ASAP
3. PROJECT DIRECTOR (Name, room number, telephone)	Mark Kumagai, Room 611, ext. 1237		

4. THE INTENDED AUDIENCE/PURPOSE IS: Industry Meeting

**IMPORTANT**

The attached project material is not to be distributed to any person or organization outside the EXHR until the following offices have authorized clearance:

## 5. CONCURRENCES

[illegible]

\*You must initial the 6(b)(6) column which will indicate your clearance is in accordance with CPSC Directive 1450.2 issued under 6(b)(6) of the CPSA concerning whether the information is accurate and not misleading.



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## CPSC Plans / Recommendations

- Monitor incidents and conduct follow up.
- Monitor ASTM standard development.
- Address problem associated with other activities (slide exits and climbing equipment) located in ball pits.
- Enhance operator / consumer awareness on maintenance / supervision.



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## Introduction

- Presentation of CPSC review of SCPE
- General Discussion
- Concluding Remarks
- Adjourn



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## Market Information

- Located in Theme Parks, Fast Food Restaurant, Pay-for- Play.
- 50-100 million customers per year.
- 600 indoor pay-for-play units in U.S.
- 7,000 - 8,000 free play units in U.S.



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## Incident Review

- Data collected from 100 hospital emergency rooms between Jan-May 1995.
- 16 cases followed up.
- Injuries: contusion / abrasions to fractures.
- Victims: 18 month - 14 years, most 5 or younger.
- One death reported.





## Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

### Staff's Observations and Concerns

- 13 centers visited.
- Equipment designed to minimize fall hazard.
- Pay-for-play centers provided supervision.
- Free play centers provided limited or no supervision, but staff observed caregivers monitoring children.
- Maintenance / hygiene necessary to ensure equipment safety.
- Fire, rescue and evacuation is a concern.



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## Staff's Observations and Concerns (cont.)

- Play centers with mixed ages and sizes of children.
- Ball pits:
  - Children bury themselves under balls.
  - Slide exits or climbing equipment in ball pits may be potential hazard.



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## CPSC Guidelines for Public Playgrounds

- All slide exits should be located in uncongested areas of the playground.
- The use zone should be free of obstacles that children could run into or fall on top of and thus be injured.
- Active physical activities should be separate from more passive or quiet activities.



# Soft Contained Play Equipment

12-5-95

## Conclusion

- Soft Contained Play Equipment designed to minimize the fall hazard.
  - Falls 75% public playground injuries.
- Supervision and maintenance necessary to ensure safety.
- Potential hazard of interfering use zones of separate activities (slide exits and climbing equipment) with ball pits.